

Eastern Action '99

Story and Photos by SGT Norinda Rodney

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1SG Courtland Pegan (wearing a borrowed CVC) checks the location of Qatari vehicles on the range.

THE 3rd Infantry Division's 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, formed Task Force 1-15 and hit the desert sands of Qatar last summer to participate in Exercise Eastern Action '99, a coalition-building effort to prepare for contingencies in Southwest Asia. The exercise was conducted on the southern training area of the U.S. Army Central Command-Qatar.

ARCENT-Qatar is a forward headquarters command of the Third U.S. Army. Qatar, a small country that shares its borders with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, is smaller than Rhode Island in both size and population. Eastern Action '99 helped to test ARCENT-Qatar's readiness and to train soldiers with the Qataris in this remote area.

"The purpose of the exercise was to practice joint reception, staging, onward movement and integration," said LTC Martin N. Stanton, commander of ARCENT-Qatar. "We did this by issuing our pre-positioned Bradley fighting vehicles, armored

personnel carriers and the M88 recovery vehicles to a unit that would use them in combat."

Stanton said the exercise also allowed U.S. soldiers to work side by side with Qatari troops. The importance of ARCENT-Qatar's participation in coalition and joint training was highlighted by recent military actions in the region. Operations Desert Thunder I and II, and Desert Fox in 1998, demonstrated the need for rapid coalition response to Iraqi aggression.

"Eastern Action '99 is one way that ARCENT-Qatar remains prepared for contingencies and coalition/joint operations," said Stanton. "We are able to quickly build up forces by flying troops in and issuing equipment that's already here."

The TF 1-15 soldiers trained and practiced writing operation orders, troop-leading procedures, vehicle patrols and personnel dismounts with the Qataris. The American soldiers discovered new things by working with their counterparts.

"Eastern Action '99 was beneficial to the Qataris and us," said SPC Mustafa Thompson. "We shared our military culture and training. In return, we learned how they do things. Communication was very important, since the mission kept changing and everyone had to be informed."

"I think this type of training helps to reinforce our ability to work well together in battle," Thompson said.

Temperatures reached 130 degrees as TF 1-15, augmented by two Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt II attack aircraft, continued maneuvers and live-fire training with the Qataris. The soldiers called the sound of the tracked vehicles moving across the desert sand "rolling thunder."

"We did well out here," said CPT Elbert Valentine. "We established a good working relationship with the Qatari soldiers. Together, we were able to execute an operations order and adapt to changes in that order."

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Task Force 1-15 soldiers maneuver their M1 on the ARCENT-Qatar Southern Training Area range during Eastern Action '99.



CPT Elbert Valentine (second from right) briefs soldiers during a rehearsal run of Eastern Action '99.

constant communications among the task force, higher headquarters and the Qataris improved our ability as a coalition team," Valentine said. "For the soldiers, using the pre-positioned equipment and training with the Qataris made the events in this exercise identical to what we would do

if we were called up for a contingency."

PFC Mauricio Garcia said he thought the exercise provided a realistic training opportunity.

"One of the best things about this exercise is that we're using the same tanks that we'd use in battle," Garcia

said. "We're also working with the same people."

Stanton said he would like to see the exercise occur more often.

"This was only the second time the Army has ever held an exercise with the Qatari army," he said. "Our goal is to improve relationships with the Qatari armed forces and to maintain